Family and Care Coordinator Story

This piece reflects the experiences of a family who were supported by Care Coordination. It addresses the hurdles they faced, and the positive outcomes Care Coordination can deliver, even during very challenging times. The family has given permission to share this interview. Names and some identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

Building Relationships during a Time of Isolation

Do you have a village? Who are your supporters? These are typical questions we ask as Care Coordinators when first starting the wraparound process with a family. As a Care Coordinator, we want families to build relationships with themselves and others in order to build a village that will provide support. However, what do we do when families are lost? When parents cannot connect with anyone around them as they are having a hard time understanding what is going on internally and externally, especially during a worldwide lockdown such as it was during the pandemic? Building relationships was not a priority to most at that time; still, families needed to feel connected to others, supported, and understood.

One particular family that had a tremendous impact on my role as a Care Coordinator is the Jimenez family. The Jimenez family consists of a mom, a dad, and two young girls diagnosed with Autism. At the beginning of the pandemic the parents were informed that their 2-year-old was on the spectrum of autism. Mom felt as if her whole world came down as her other 4-year-old daughter was also diagnosed as being on the spectrum. Mom felt alone and isolated as no one in her family had this experience of having a child with special needs and little information about what autism was and looked like to the family. Both children at that time were non-verbal, and had no services and supports in place. Mom felt lonely and unable to connect with herself, her family, and her community.

Phase one of engagement and team preparation took a lot more time, as there were many barriers. Barriers included a lack of natural support, as Mom did not have any additional family around the area as most of her family lived in Peru as well as there was a language barrier that made it difficult for her to reach out for help. Additionally, every service was offered only through Zoom and schools were closed during the time of COVID-19, which made things more challenging. Mom was anxious, and worried about the future of her daughters. Mom feared that the girls would never obtain the support needed for their “special condition” as she mentioned many times through telehealth. Mom was worried about connecting to others and people not understanding her children's needs emotionally and physically. Mom had many doubts about seeking help as she felt no one understood her or her children.

The way to connect with Mom was to become the first member of her village, listening, asking questions, building rapport, and intensely hearing her needs with my ears and heart. Little by little building a relationship with Mom helped to bring more members, members whom she felt zero judgment from, people whom she trusted her daughters with, all working together using a team-based planning process. I saw Mom transform in every Child and Family Team meeting we had. In the beginning, Mom was apprehensive about supports and how anyone could improve their lives. Creating a

partnership with Mom, and demonstrating to Mom that there are people around her willing to listen, help, and move forward led her to have hope for achieving her family's vision. The vision Mom had was for her children to be respected as individuals and not seen just by their diagnosis. During the Child and Family Team Meeting, Mom was able to find her voice as she realized her expertise as a mother was important and began driving the process. Through collaboration, we were able to clarify needs and identify strengths and resources to create an individualized plan of care for them.

Building relationships with a team that includes the family, the child, natural supports, caseworkers, educational staff, and other child servicing agencies brought back the power to this mom and her family. Mom was able to connect with FAVOR Peer Support staff for educational support, individual therapist for emotional support, and Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA0 services. They even got a new landlord that understood the special circumstances and now the girls have a place to live without the police being called for noise disturbances. Her father from Peru come to the USA to help with childcare for mom and some time for herself; she became friends with her hairdresser to have someone to talk to. All of these people form part of her village today. Today Mom feels connected, accepted, and embraced by every member of her village while she is still navigating the needs of her daughters.

Working as a Care Coordinator has been extremely rewarding; the work we do to help equalize the playing field and bring the power back to families. As a Care Coordinator, my hope is for everyone to have a team-based approach, where we all come together on behalf of a child to build relationships where we collaborate, strengthen, and empower our families. For families to realize they are not alone and they have or can have many members in their village no matter the circumstance.